

## *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

### Socratic Seminar

The following questions will be the format for our formal Socratic Seminar on Monday. Please select one of the following questions and prepare an essay response using your insight and evidence from the novel to support those claims. A minimum of 1.5 to two-typed, double-spaced pages is due 4/2/2012.

1. Novelist Ernest Hemingway stated, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*." Writer T.S. Eliot called it a "masterpiece." It has been published and sold in more languages than any other American novel. Yet for being so colloquial in dialect, it has universal appeal. Why does Twain's message still resonate throughout the world? Why does it have such universal appeal? Why, according to Hemingway, would he make the preceding assertion?
2. Is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a racist novel? In light of our prior discussion and what you watched in the Culture Shock video, explain using supporting evidence from the text to back your claims.
3. What would Jim want to say to Frederick Douglass if he read his autobiography? What would Frederick Douglass want to say to Jim if he read *Huck Finn*? Create a conversation between the two, the real life figure of Fredrick Douglass and the fictional character of Jim. What would the two say to one another? In recreating the conversation, find points in *Huck Finn* that Frederick Douglass spoke to in his slave narratives (treatment and conditions of slaves, southern "ministers," Southern "hospitality").
4. Consider the issue of freedom of the individual in a democratic society versus the demands and constraints of that society. Identify as many scenes and situations as you can that deal with this issue. At what point is the individual free to counter the requirements, moral code, or restrictions of society?
5. Mark Twain is a wonderful satirist and often depicts situations about humanity which he thought needed changing. Select three satirical events in the novel, explain them with page quotations and page numbers. Finally, what is Mark Twain revealing about the inadequacies of his society?
6. Mark Twain's language in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is frequently ironic. Mark Twain uses Huck's innocence and the reader's perceptions to depict life's ironies. Describe three of these situations and their overall effect. How is this powerful dialogue between Twain and the reader? Explain.
7. Develop a character sketch of Huck Finn. Point out his weak and strong character traits. Discuss his opinions and his relationships with different people.

8. An important element of *Huck Finn* is the humor in the novel. Discuss the humor in the novel. Refer to at least three different incidents or comments that you consider particularly funny. How are they typical of humor within the novel?
9. Twain gives us two lengthy examples of senseless violence in the episodes with the Grangerfords and the Shepherdson's and Colonel Sherburn's killing of Boggs. Explain what Twain is saying about the human race in these incidences. Is Twain's point still valid today? Give some examples from modern society to back up your point.
10. Writer David Bradley notes that many have criticized the ending of *Huck Finn* but "none of them have been able to suggest—much less write a better ending....They failed for the same reason that Twain wrote the ending as he did: America has never been able to write any ending at all." What do you think he means? Explain.
11. Choose at least three minor characters to discuss in detail. What is their function/purpose within the novel?
12. Which character gave Huck the most trouble in the book? Explain with examples.
13. When Huck decides to help Jim escape, what do you think drives his decision?
14. What is ironic about Huck's statement that he will "go to hell" if he helps Jim escape?
15. How do the scenes with large groups of people on shore reveal Twain's view of humanity?
16. Who is the hero of the novel, Huck or Jim? Explain.
17. How long can one live in and accept a society without playing its games? And having played them, how long can one remain in such a society without becoming permanently infected by its "morality"?
18. How is the journey *Huck Finn* takes down the Mississippi both an adventure on the river itself and a metaphorical journey for his own moral growth?